

# BIDWELL MANSION

STATE HISTORIC PARK

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50¢

State of California • The Resources Agency

Department of Parks & Recreation

P.O. Box 942896 • Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

12-91





Annie and John Bidwell with their custom-made tent camping out in the Sierra Nevada, 1898.

Touring and supervising the overall development of his ranch always remained one of John Bidwell's most satisfying activities. Here he sits astride his favorite mule in 1892 — about the time of his presidential candidacy.



In the years after 1875 John and Annie Bidwell continued to press for election reform and control of the monopolies, especially in the public service fields of transportation and communication. Together they fought for women's rights — especially the right to vote — and for prohibition. They felt that the use of alcohol in political campaigns was extremely destructive of ideas and idealism. Their activity in these matters brought people such as Francis E. Willard of the temperance movement and Susan B. Anthony of the women's rights movement to Rancho Chico and the Bidwell mansion.

Over the years the Bidwells traveled widely, visiting Europe and Alaska as well as Washington, New York City, and other points on the east coast. Some part of each summer was spent in the Sierra Nevada or on the slopes of Mount Shasta or Lassen Peak. Their interest in natural history ranged from astronomy to wildflowers and brought them lifelong friendships with John Muir, Asa Gray, Sir Joseph Hooker, and other leading scientists of the time.

Their interest in education (especially higher education) as the cornerstone of a free and enlightened society led to friendships with David Starr Jordan of Stanford and Joseph LeConte of the University of California. Gifts of land and money or books were made to various educational institutions. Chico State University, for instance, stands on land donated by the Bidwells, and both John and Annie served as trustees of the school. John Bidwell also served briefly as a regent of the University of California.

In 1890 John Bidwell accepted the Prohibition Party's nomination for governor and though he stood no real chance of winning the election, his uncompromising idealism and eloquence in that campaign led to his nomination for president in 1892 by the National Prohibition Party. His speech, accepting the nomination, was widely read and though he did not campaign in any other way he nevertheless received more votes than any Prohibition candidate for president before or since. Interestingly enough almost all of his ideas — highly controversial at the time — have since been adopted into law and today many of them — particularly women's suffrage and other almost equally basic election reform measures — are taken for granted.

## THE BIDWELL HERITAGE

Active and involved to the very end, John Bidwell died April 4, 1900 at 80 years of age while cutting wood on his estate. A massive boulder — red basalt from the hills of Rancho Chico — was placed on his gravesite in the cemetery he had donated to the city of Chico. For 18 years thereafter Annie continued to live graciously in the mansion, devoting herself to the ideas and ideals she had shared with her husband. In 1905, following the intent of her husband's



## POLITICS AGAIN – AND OTHER INTERESTS

In 1875 John Bidwell came out of political retirement to run for governor once again, this time as the nominee of the Independent Party – a newly formed alliance of Republicans, Democrats, and others who opposed the continuing domination of the railroad and other monopoly interests. Bidwell was still extremely popular with the people of California, but this time the monopoly interests brought in eastern campaign professionals who launched a very effective though in many ways highly unethical campaign against him. They lampooned Bidwell

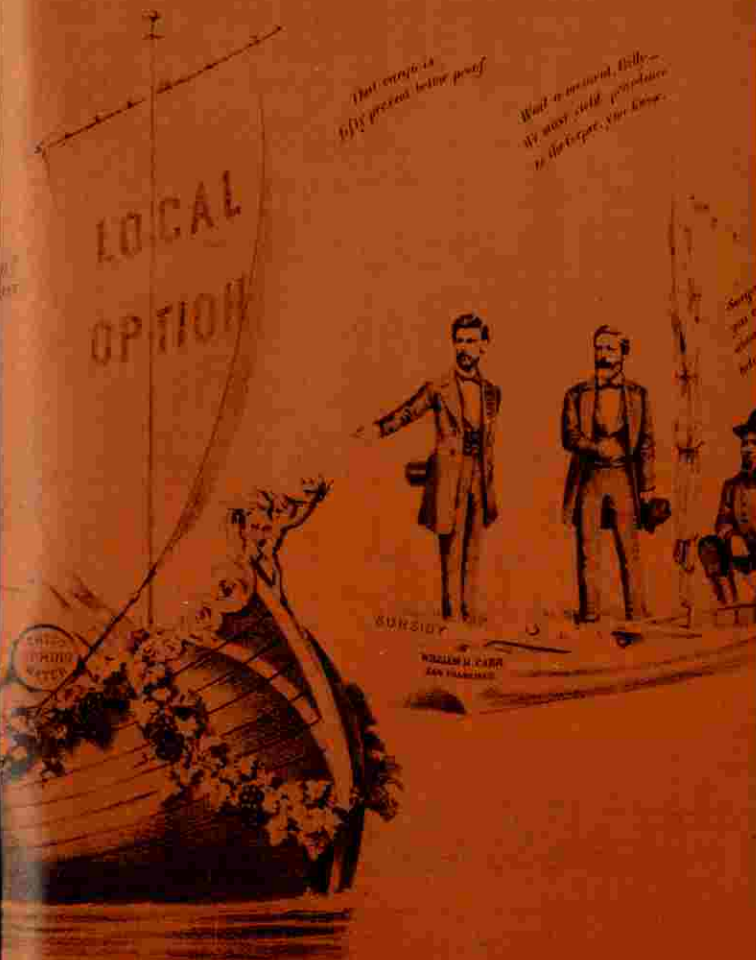
as an overly-moralistic, anti-alcohol fanatic, and they claimed that he was guilty of fraud and other kinds of criminal activity. Bidwell was forced to deny all these charges and try to set the record straight time after time, but despite his quietly convincing explanations, the campaign professionals were able little by little to blunt Bidwell's anti-monopoly stance and blur his image as an intensely dedicated patriot interested in far-reaching public-interest reforms. Many observers agreed that Bidwell would have won the election rather easily at the time of his nomination, but the campaign went on for another six weeks and ended with Bidwell's defeat at the polls.

In this cartoon entitled "The New Elaine" one political satirist of the 1870s pictured Bidwell as a corpse headed up the wrong river while the special interests prepared to set sail together in search of new governmental subsidies.

strengthen Bidwell—  
by my next speech  
don't suit you, such  
of that grape vine.

CAPITOL SALT RIVER

WARDEN





was further heightened on the exterior by covering the brick walls with pink-tinted plaster and painting the wood trim a complimentary brown tone.

In October, 1867 after a year and a half of correspondence, Annie finally agreed to marry her charmingly gentle yet persistent and persuasive suitor and follow him to the remote, rather wild, Indian-filled frontier paradise of Chico, California. The next spring — in April 1868 — amid a swirl of festivities that were the highlight of Washington's social season, Annie and John were married in Washington, D. C. with President Andrew Johnson, General Grant, and other notables in attendance.

When the Bidwells arrived in California, they found the new house on Rancho Chico still unfinished, but Annie was nevertheless delighted with the mansion and its beautiful tree-shaded setting close beside Chico Creek. She

LEFT: Bidwell Mansion as drawn prior to construction by the architect, H. W. Cleveland. LOWER LEFT: Chico's brass band was made up of Indian musicians from Rancho Arroyo Chico. BELOW: The Rancho's Indian church and cemetery.



enthusiastically set about furnishing the house and creating the air of hospitality and enlightenment that was subsequently so greatly admired by visitors from many parts of the state and nation.

In the years that followed, Annie and John Bidwell worked closely together on projects of mutual concern. The Meechoopda Indians who lived on the ranch became Annie's special responsibility. For years John Bidwell had protected them from the violence of gold-rush and later settlers, had given them work, and otherwise helped them survive and maintain their self respect. Now Annie dedicated herself to improving their educational and employment opportunities and simultaneously tried to show them the value of Christianity as a way of life. She taught Sunday School classes for them, gave sermons, and even had herself ordained as a Presbyterian minister so that she could perform baptisms, marriages, and other ceremonies for them.





ing her family home and many activities. Little by little, however, she found herself overwhelmed by Bidwell's enthusiasm and the intensity of his devotion not only to her but to many of the ideals that were important to her. In March, 1866, Bidwell's term in Congress expired and, after obtaining Annie's promise to correspond regularly, he returned to California.

### JOHN BIDWELL — THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Bidwell's personal popularity was at an all-time high as he returned to California, and he was confident that he would soon be elected governor. He was not prepared, however, to cope with the all-out, no-holds-barred campaign used by the railroad monopoly interests to keep him from receiving the Union Party nomination. Shock and outrage ran through the state when the Union Party convention (bought, sold, and otherwise rigged by the railroad interests) passed over Bidwell in favor of George C. Gorham, a railroad lobbyist. This action effectively destroyed the Union Party in California, and without either Bidwell or the party behind him Gorham was soundly defeated in the November election. Bidwell himself was so thoroughly disgusted with the corrupt behind-the-scenes process he had witnessed that he vowed never again to run for public office. Various splinter groups offered to nominate him to run against Gorham, but he refused. Meanwhile, everyone — even the opposition — agreed that Bidwell would have been unbeatable had he been nominated by the Union Party.

### BIDWELL MANSION

Turning his back on politics, Bidwell threw himself wholeheartedly into the pursuit of other more personal goals. The ranch with its huge payroll — 100 to 500 employees — had been seriously mismanaged during his absence in Washington. The City of Chico, which he had founded and begun to develop in 1860, was prospering but also deserved more of his time and thought. In a more private way, however, perhaps the most important and pressing project of all was the successful completion of the 26-room mansion he had begun in 1865 prior to leaving for Washington. Through his correspondence with Annie and his close work with Henry W. Cleveland, the very popular and fashionable San Francisco architect who later designed the Palace Hotel, Bidwell followed every detail of construction and spent whatever money was needed to create the gracious home he hoped Annie would come west to share with him. The most modern gas lighting, plumbing, and water systems were installed, and every detail of hardware and handwork was meticulously finished. Overall style of the three-story brick house was that of an Italian villa or country estate — an informal, warmly romantic style that



0 2  
Miles

Sacramento  
River

Chico Landing

Chico Creek

City of Chico

The Esplanade

Hooker Oak \*

Chico Canyon

In its heyday Rancho Arroyo Chico included some 22,000 acres, with grazing in the foothills to the east and broad fields of grain, orchards, and other more intensive agricultural activities on the rich soil of the valley. The Hooker Oak (below) is generally considered to be the largest valley oak in the world.





## POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE

In August, 1849, John Bidwell was named as a delegate to California's Constitutional Convention. He was in the mountains, however, and did not learn of his appointment until it was too late to attend. In November, 1849, he was elected to the first state senate where he served with distinction. In May, 1850, his senate colleagues sent him to Washington, D. C. to lobby for California statehood and to deliver a 125-pound block of gold-bearing quartz as California's contribution to the Washington Monument.

After his return to California (with the statehood charter), he chose not to stand for re-election, but continued to play a leading role in Democratic Party politics. In 1859 he chaired a major convention in San Francisco to promote construction of a transcontinental railroad. In 1860 he was one of eight California delegates to the Democratic Party convention in Charleston, South Carolina, where his strong pro-Union stance brought him national attention as a patriot and idealist, and as an independent within the Democratic Party.

During the Civil War Bidwell helped organize pro-Union forces in California, and in 1863 was given the rank of Brigadier General in the state militia by Governor Leland Stanford. In 1864 Bidwell went east once again as a delegate to the Union Party convention that nominated Abraham Lincoln for re-election. His descriptions of Lincoln and General Ulysses S. Grant, whom he visited at the battlefield, were amply reported in the California newspapers, and upon his return home Bidwell was greeted as a hero. A few months later he was elected to Congress.

## ANNIE ELLICOTT KENNEDY BIDWELL

As a congressman in Washington, Bidwell was immediately drawn into the highest social and political circles. As chairman of the agriculture committee he came into contact with J.C.G. Kennedy, a socially prominent, high-ranking Washington official, and soon afterward met his daughter, Annie Ellicott Kennedy. Bidwell visited the Kennedy family repeatedly and soon various rumors were circulating about his intentions, although his name was most often linked with that of Annie's vivacious younger sister Sallie. Not until he was touring Europe between congressional sessions did Bidwell realize that despite himself and despite his age (he was then 48), he was hopelessly, head-over-heels in love with Annie, the beautiful, serious-minded oldest daughter of the Kennedys.

For her part, Annie enjoyed the company of the rather imposing, strikingly handsome congressman from California, but she was fairly sure she would never marry. Already 27, deeply religious, and committed to a number of moral and social causes, she could not conceive of leav-



Annie Ellicott Kennedy as she appeared about 1867.



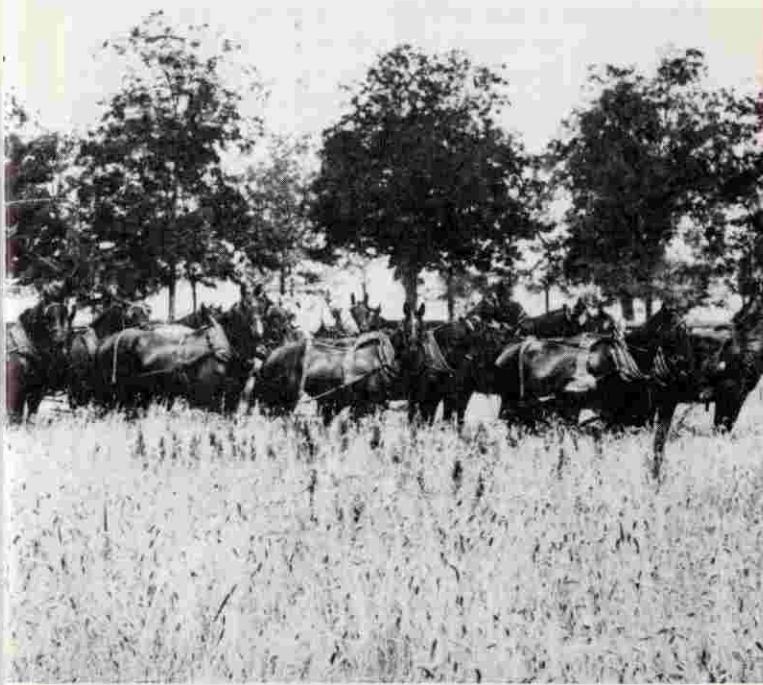
experimental nursery, and herds of cattle, horses, pigs, and other animals.

The keynote of Bidwell's management policy was diversity, and this plus innovation — both horticultural and technical — soon brought him unparalleled success. He introduced many crops to California (the casaba melon, for instance), was a leader in the dried-fruit industry, and became a leading producer of olive oil and various kinds of

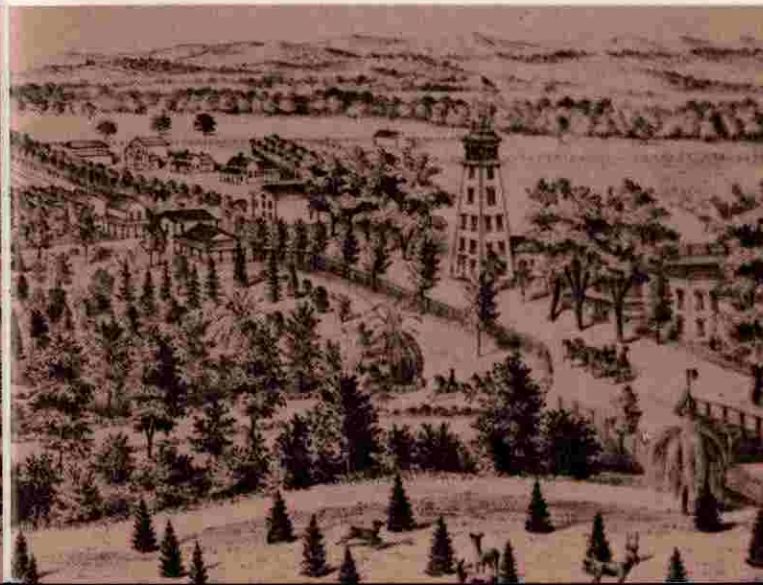
fruits and nuts. His agricultural commodities won prizes in statewide, national, and even international competitions. In fact, the soil of Rancho Chico was so rich and Bidwell's interest in his farm so intense and enthusiastic that Rancho Chico soon came to be the most successful and widely admired farm in the state, while Bidwell himself was generally considered to be the state's leading agriculturalist.



Above, a horse-drawn "combine" (combination harvester and thresher) bringing in a rich harvest of grain on Rancho Arroyo Chico. Below, the old adobe residence buildings were torn down in



the 1870s and the grounds around the Mansion were landscaped with ornamental trees. The water tower and flour mill remained standing, however, just across the Esplanade as shown here.





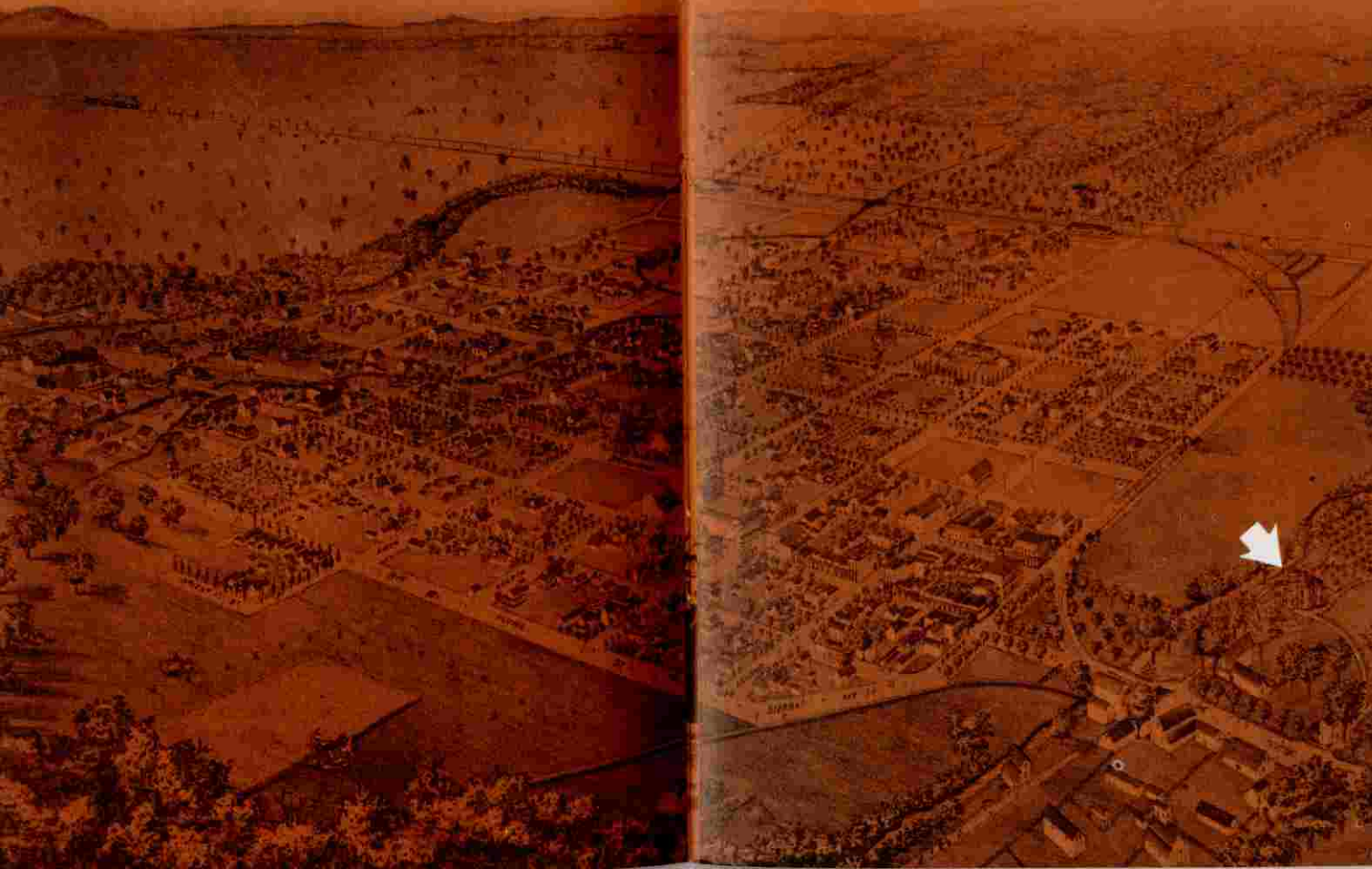
## RANCHO DEL ARROYO CHICO

Bidwell had been granted large areas of land by the Mexican government prior to 1846, but the land he liked best of all — the land on either side of Chico Creek in the upper Sacramento Valley — had been granted to others. After 1847 he began to sell or give away his own holdings in order to purchase the land of his choice. Eventually, using his gold rush earnings, he was able to acquire some 28,000 acres of land and to stock it with cattle, horses, fruit trees, grain, and other commodities. He built a log cabin for a residence and later replaced it with a larger adobe house. In 1853 a flour mill was completed, and by the following year all elements of his agricultural enterprise were in operation. There were vast fields of wheat and other grains, vineyards, several kinds of fruit orchards, an

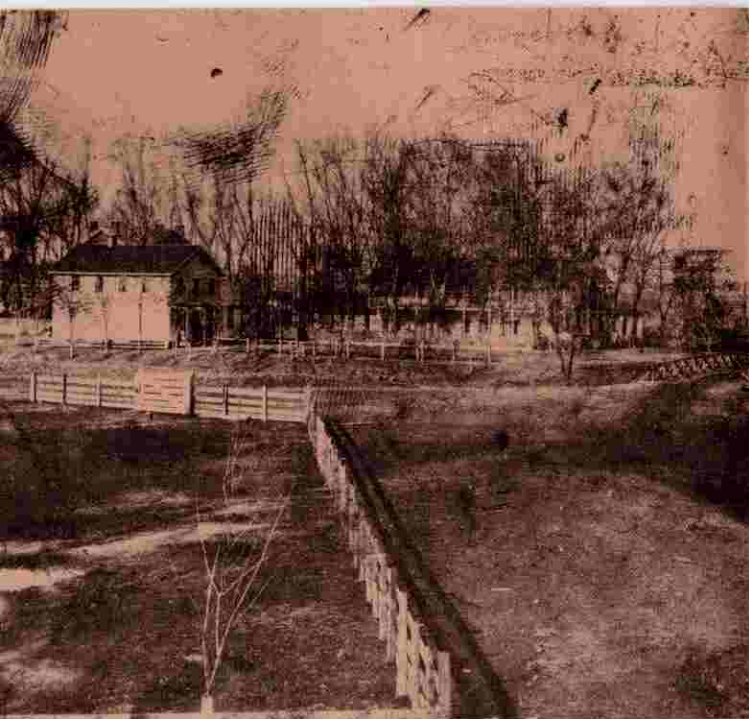


Main office of the ranch was located just across the creek from the Mansion on First Street in the City of Chico.

The railroad reached the prosperous little town of Chico about 1870. Bidwell Mansion is at lower right. From a lithograph by Britton & Rey, 1871.







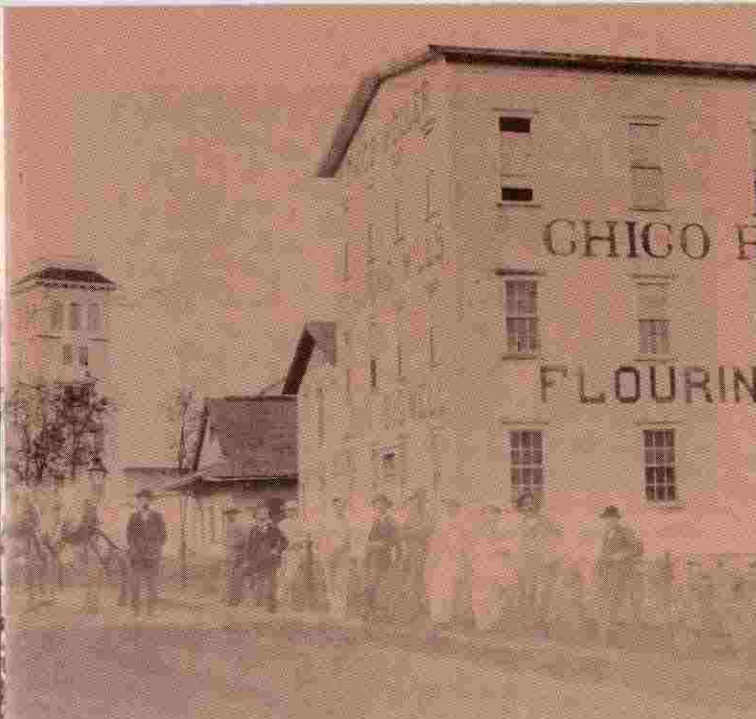
The two-story, adobe buildings of Rancho Chico stood near the present site of Bidwell Mansion. Chico Creek is in the foreground.

## THE EARLY YEARS

Born in 1819 in western New York State, Bidwell lived with his family on the old northeastern frontier until 1836 when he left home to pursue his education. Then in 1839 he decided to seek his fortune in Missouri, which was just being opened up to U. S. settlers. Two years later, having heard stories about the wonders of California, he helped organize "The Western Emigration Society" and soon afterward became a member of the first overland wagontrain company of settlers to head for the Mexican Province of Alta California.

After his arrival in California young Bidwell, just 22 years of age, found employment at Sutter's Fort in the Sacramento Valley. John Sutter found him trustworthy and competent, and assigned him ever increasing responsibilities. After the purchase of Fort Ross from the Russians, for instance, Sutter put Bidwell in charge of dismantling that outpost and transferring everything of value to Sutter's Fort. Later Bidwell took charge of Sutter's major agricultural enterprise at Hock Farm, and in 1845 he became Sutter's bookkeeper and general manager.

Throughout this time it was evident to many people that Mexico would eventually lose control of California and that the province would be taken over by some other foreign power — probably the United States. In 1846, soon after the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, U. S.



Warehouses, a water tower, and the flour mill were located just across the Esplanade from the Mansion.

troops came ashore, claimed the province, and established an interim military government. Bidwell was critical of John C. Fremont's high-handed, self-glorifying tactics, but he favored U. S. takeover and therefore joined Fremont's California Battalion at Sonoma, serving in the Army in various capacities and finally attaining the rank of Major.

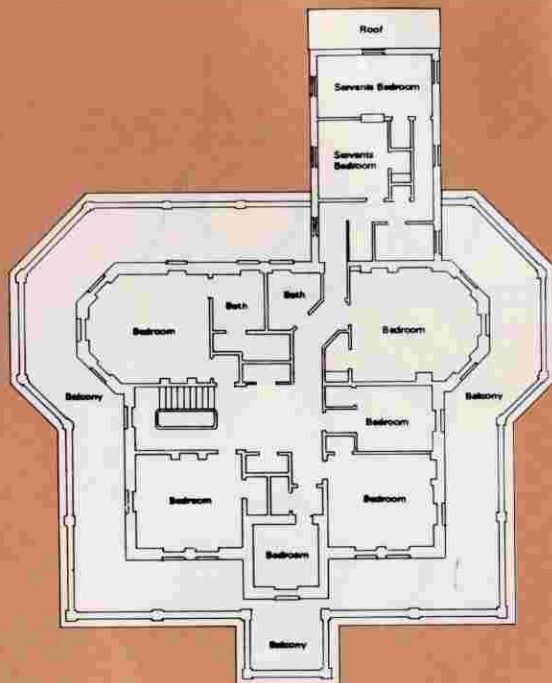
## BIDWELL AND THE GOLD DISCOVERY

Major Bidwell returned to the Sacramento Valley fully intending to strike off on his own and become a farmer. Shortly after his return, however, James Marshall revealed that he had discovered gold in the tailrace of a lumbermill he was building for Sutter at Coloma. Word of Marshall's discovery began to spread rapidly. Bidwell himself carried the news to San Francisco, and soon the rush was on.

In mid-1848 Bidwell and a number of companions discovered gold on the Feather River and thus set off a rush to that area. New settlements sprang up overnight, and one of them about 12 miles east of Oroville became known as Bidwell's Bar. By 1854 the town had a population of some 3,000 people and was the county seat of Butte County.

Bidwell himself spent two seasons mining for gold — mainly using hired Indian labor. He also operated a trading post at Bidwell's Bar, but as soon as he could afford to do so he left the mountains and set about becoming a farmer.

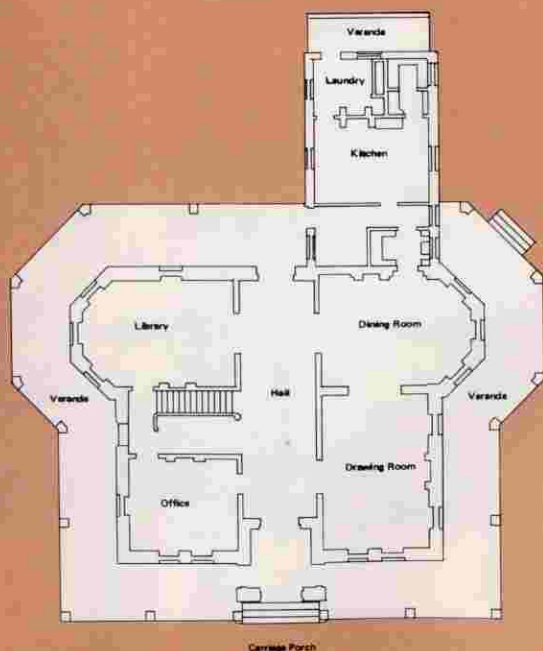




**Home of General John Bidwell and  
his wife Annie E. K. Bidwell**

**Center of Social and Political Life  
in the upper Sacramento Valley**

**Headquarters of Rancho Chico – at  
one time the most famous and highly  
diversified agricultural enterprise  
in California**



*idwell Mansion was the home of John Bidwell and his wife Annie Ellicott Kennedy Bidwell from the time of their marriage in 1868 until the end of their lives in 1900 and 1918 respectively. It stands today as a memorial to them and celebrates, through their memory, those qualities of the human mind and spirit - enlightenment, generosity, concern for the well-being of humanity - that gave beauty, meaning and purpose to their lives.*

### **JOHN BIDWELL**

During his lifetime John Bidwell was known throughout California and across the nation as an important pioneer, farmer, soldier, statesman, politician, and philanthropist. He thought of himself, however, as a farmer first and foremost — a man of the soil who believed that good agriculture was the cornerstone of prosperity and contentment. Tall, handsome, extremely able, and incorruptibly honest, Bidwell was a natural leader, a free and independent spirit — almost instinctively a pioneer in every field he entered.





will, she gave 1,900 acres of land on either side of Chico Creek to the City of Chico for use as a public park and as a memorial to her husband. In 1911 she added another 301 acres to the park and made other gifts of land to the city. Today Bidwell Park extends along both sides of Chico Creek from the heart of town to the hills and canyons of the Sierra Nevada foothills some ten miles to the east. With its combination of undisturbed natural landscape and thoughtfully developed recreational facilities, Bidwell Park is today one of the largest and most beautiful city-owned and operated parks in the United States.

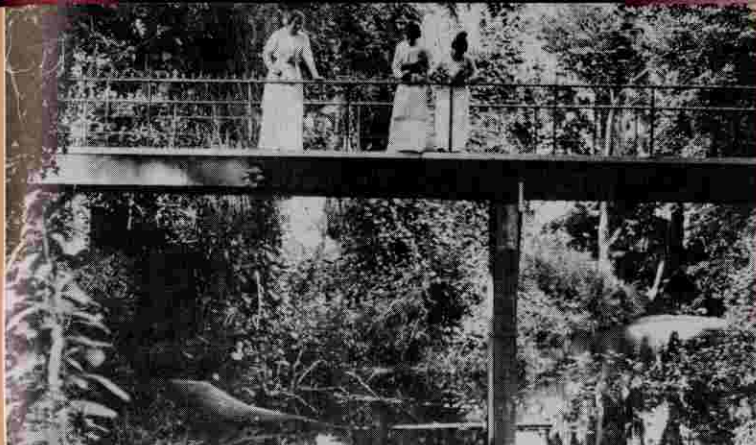
Following her death on March 10, 1918 Annie's concern for human welfare was further expressed in her lengthy and complicated will. By means of some 120 cash bequests ranging in amount from \$100 to \$10,000 she gave away some \$260,000 to friends, relations, and various causes. There were also gifts of land and other assets, all marked with stipulations as to their future use and wise management. Bidwell Mansion and much of the rest of Rancho Chico was given to the Presbyterian Church, with the house itself to be used as a co-educational school where in the Bidwell ideals would continue to be taught to successive generations of students. The church found it impossible to operate such a school, however, and in 1923 sold the house to Chico State for use as a women's dormitory.

In 1964, following many years of strong citizen interest and increasing public pressure, (special legislation was passed in 1953 and 1957) an arrangement was made whereby Chico State agreed to turn the Mansion over to the State Park System for preservation and interpretation as a State Historic Park. Since that time with the continuing interest and help of many private citizens the Mansion has been gradually refurnished and restored to very nearly its original appearance by the California Department of Parks and Recreation. In 1973 the Bidwell Mansion Cooperating Association was formed in order to give interested private citizens a continuing opportunity to work with the Department in restoring and interpreting the Mansion.

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Bidwell Mansion is now open to the public every day from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. A visitor center in the building itself includes displays and publications about the life and times of the Bidwells, and guided tours of the mansion are conducted at frequent intervals throughout the day. Advance reservations for special group tours can be made by contacting the park headquarters.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park  
525 The Esplanade  
Chico, California 95926  
Phone (916) 345-6144



Top, wild grape vines trail from massive oaks and sycamores alongside pretty little Arroyo Chico — the stream for which the ranch was named. Middle, the Mansion filled with flowers and ready for entertaining, Annie and two friends pause on the staircase about 1905. Bottom, Annie Bidwell as she appeared about 1915 sitting in the garden just outside the Mansion.